PREFACE

There is variety of introductory literature on Islam already existing. In this booklet, however, an attempt is made to introduce Islam in the format of simple questions and answers in a related sequence for reaching out to lay persons of different backgrounds. In includes only some of the most important issues - those which deserve attention of the curious non-Muslim minds. This would serve as a backdrop while one goes through further literature on Islam and, *Insha Allah*, would help as a good foundation for the understanding of this universal faith and its followers.

May Allah reward Shaikh Essam Eshaq for going through the draft and suggesting necessary corrections. This publication is the first in a series of issues from "Discover Islam".

Nothing from us except with the help of Allah.

Syed R. Ali Bahrain,
1.1.92

Second Edition 1996

ISLAM & MUSLIMS

"ISLAM" AND "MUSLIM": DEFINITION AND DESCRIPTION

1. **What is your religion?**

A. Islam.

2. **Who is a Muslim?**

A. Any person, anywhere in the world, who submits himself/herself to the will of the One True God and organizes his/her life according to the teachings of the last Prophet of God, is a Muslim, i.e., one who practises Islam.

3. **Where do the names 'ISLAM' and 'MUSLIM' come from?**

A. These are God-given names, found in the Qur'an – the final revelation from God.

... It is He Who has named you MUSLIMS, both before and in this (Revelation);... (Chapter 22 : verse 78)
The religion (way of life) in the sight of God is ISLAM. (3:19)

4. **Can Islam also be called "Mohammedanism", and Muslims as "Mohammedans"?**

A. No. These are inaccurate terms coined by non-Muslim Western scholars, the orientalists. Muslims reject these terms, since they offend the very spirit of Islam. Muslims do not worship Mohammed (peace be upon him) but regard him as a human who was a Prophet and Messenger of God; nor is Islam limited to Mohammed (pbuh) alone, but goes much beyond this and recognizes all other Prophets of God with respect and reverence.

5. **Why are you a Muslim?**

A. Because ISLAM is a natural way of life. To be MUSLIM means to be in harmony with nature. Moreover, it is the only religion acceptable to God:

If anyone desires a religion other than ISLAM, never will it be accepted of him; and in the Hereafter he shall be among the losers. (3:85)
O ye who believe! Fear God as He should be feared, and die not except in a state of ISLAM (i.e. as a MUSLIM). (3:102)

6. **How can you say this?**

A. This point will be clear if one understands the meaning of 'ISLAM'.

7. **Does the word "ISLAM" have any meaning?**

A. Yes. "ISLAM" means total submission or self-surrender to the will of the One True God. It has another shade of meaning: peace. In fact, these two meanings are not separate, but are related to each other. Thus, "Islam" is the attainment of peace through loving and total submission to the will of the One True God.

8. **What do you mean by "submission to the will of the One True God"?**

A. It means: accepting the only One True God, the Creator of all, as our Lord and Savior, obeying His commands and worshiping none other than Him. This submission is not in a negative sense, but in a positive sense; it is a loving, willing and conscious submission which is indeed needed for our own good. It is not a lip service but has to be manifested in the thoughts and deeds, in the actual practical life, of a person.

9. **One meaning of ISLAM is "Peace". What does this denote?**

A. It denotes peace in a broad and comprehensive sense: peace of mind, peace at heart, peace with the Creator, peace with other humans and peace with other creatures, in fact, with the entire creation.

10. **What about the names of other religions? Do they also have functional meanings?**

A. No. The names of other religions are essentially the identification titles rather than descriptive and functional names.

1- These names have no particular intrinsic significance; they were simply derived after the name of a *person,* as in the case of Christianity, which was named after Christ, Buddhism after Buddha; or after the name of a *tribe* like Judaism after the tribe of Judah; or after the name of a *place*, like Hinduism after Hind (a variation of Sindh, Indus in English). By contrast, the name "Islam" represents the central principle of God's religion: total submission to the will of God. It is an attributive or a descriptive title, a name with great meaning.

2- These names were not given by God, or the Prophets of God, or even by their followers; these were adopted by the people outside the faith, like the name Christianity which was first referred to by the Pagans and the Jews in a derogatory manner. But the name "Islam" was given by God.

3- These names were adopted not during the life time of the respective Prophets, but much later.

11. **If "submission to the will of God" is Islam, then can we say that even other creatures are also 'Muslims'?**

A. Yes. This submission can be recognized at two levels:

1- One level is "compulsory" submission, where there is no question of freedom of choice. All creatures (the sun, the moon, the ocean, plants, animals, etc.) submit to the laws devised by God in nature. So they are all 'muslims'. A stone thrown up in the air, for example, cannot choose to remain up, or come down after a little more time. Even those persons who deny the existence of God submit to the laws set by God in the biological aspects, e.g., their heart-beats or blood pressure or any other biological system, have no choice to go against the laws set by God. So, at this level they are also 'muslims'.

2- At the second level there is freedom in choosing to do or not to do in some aspects of life (like moral laws, obedience to the commands of God), which is enjoyed by humans. If a person chooses to obey God's laws in his/her daily life, it will be a "willing" or "conscious" or "voluntary" submission. With a harmony between the "compulsory submission" and the "submission by choice" a person gets total harmony in this universe, and will be at Peace.

So, we could say that Islam is a natural way of life, or it is the "religion of nature". The Qur'an says:

Do they seek for other than the religion of God? - while all creatures in the heavens and on earth have, willingly or unwillingly, bowed to His will (in Islam], and to Him shall they all be brought back. (3:83)

12. **Can we also say that children too are MUSLIMS?**

A. The Islamic concept is that every child, even born in a non-Muslim or atheist family, is a Muslim. Till it reaches the age of discretion (to be able to choose between the right and the wrong path) it is in a state of "compulsory submission". So it is also a muslim; if it dies, it will not be held accountable for its deeds and will go to paradise. It will. As Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him[1]) said:

The pen records not the deeds of three: of the child until he becomes a youth, of the unconscious until he awakes, and of the insane until he regains sanity.

13. **Is it not true that every child is born with 'original sin', as most modern day Christians believe?**

A. No. Children are sinless; they do not inherit sin, because sin is something that is acquired by an individual, as a consequence of his/her actions. Even the Bible rejects this concept, and it is contrary to the teachings of Jesus (peace be upon him). To quote the Bible, for example:

The person who sins shall die. A child shall not suffer for the inequity of a parent, nor a parent suffer for the inequity of a child; the righteousness of the

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[1] Muslims express their respect and gratitude for all prophets by this comment added after the mention of the name of every prophet.

righteous shall be his own, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be his own. (Ezekiel 18:20)

But all shall die for their own sins ... (Jeremiah 31:30)

Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 18:3)

But Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as that the kingdom of heaven belongs. (Matthew 19:14)

14. **How about a non-Muslim who embraces Islam?**

A. By embracing Islam, in fact, a person comes back to his /her original religion (hence referred to as a "revert" rather than "convert" to Islam), and receives the greatest blessing of God. The All-Forgiving and Most-Merciful God forgives all the past sins and mistakes of such a person and he/she starts his/her life with a clean slate, as if born again. The Holy Qur'an says:

Say to the unbelievers, if [now] they desist [from unbelief], their past would be forgiven. (8:38)

Say: 'O my servants who have transgressed against their souls! Despair not of the mercy of God; surely God forgives all sins; verily He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. (39:53)

According to a saying of the Prophet (pbuh):

If a person embraces Islam sincerely, then God shall forgive all his past sins, and after that the reward of his good deeds will be ten times to seven hundred times, and an evil deed will be recorded as it is, unless God forgives it.

15. **Will a new Muslim be inferior to a person born to Muslim parents?**

A. No. On the contrary, a new Muslim could be better than many 'born Muslims'. Islam teaches that no person is superior over any other person on the basis of birth, race, tribe, nationality, language, color, wealth or gender. The Holy Qur'an says:

... Verily, the most honored of you in the sight of God is the one who is most God-conscious ... (49:13)

Prophet Mohammed (pbuh), in his historical farewell sermon, said:

O people! Verily your Lord and Sustainer is One and your ancestor is one. All of you descend from Adam, and Adam was made of clay. There is no superiority for an Arab over a non-Arab, nor for a non-Arab over an Arab, neither for a white person over a black, nor a black person over a white, except through God- consciousness. Indeed the noblest among you is the one who is most God-conscious.

ISLAM BEFORE MOHAMMED (PBUH)

16. **Isn't Islam a new religion founded or started by Mohammed (pbuh)?**

A. No. Islam, as a matter of fact, is the world's oldest religion. Mohammed (pbuh) never claimed that he brought to the people a new religion. The Holy Qur'an mentions:

The same religion He has established for you as that He enjoined on Noah – that which We have revealed to you (O Mohammed) - that which We enjoined on Abraham, and Moses, and Jesus, that ye should remain steadfast in religion and make no divisions therein. (42:13)

Sa ye : 'we believe in God, and that which has been revealed to us, and that which was revealed to Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob and the Tribes, and that which was given to Moses and Jesus, and to the Prophets from their Lord; we make no distinction between one and another of them, and to Him we submit [in Islam]'. (3:84)

17. **Does this mean that Islam was the religion of all the Prophets of God?**

A. Yes. All the Prophets of God, as well as their followers, were Muslims, because they submitted to the will of the One True God. For example the Holy Qur'an says:

Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but a strict Muslim. (3:67)

Noah addressed his people saying: '... I have been commanded to be one of those who submit to God's will [in Islam].' (10:72)

The sons of Jacob (pbuh) replying to him said: 'We shall worship your God and God of your fathers - Abraham and Ishmael, and Isaac - the One God; to Him we bow [in Islam]'. (2:133)

In English language usage, the word "MUSLIM" refers to a person belonging to a historically recognized religious community starting from the time of Prophet Mohammed (pbuh). But in the Arabic language, as the word has an abstract meaning, it refers to the one who submits to God's will. When we say somebody prior to Mohammed (pbuh) was Muslim, it is primarily in this functional sense.

18. **Do you mean that the religion of Jesus was also Islam?**

A. Yes, his religion was no other than Islam. Consider the following points:

1- As Jesus (pbuh) submitted his will to the will of One True God, he was a Muslim. In the Bible we find many references indicating that Jesus was teaching "to believe in One True God, and to keep the commandments of God, or to do the will of God". One word (in Arabic) for this statement is "ISLAM". Some examples of Jesus' (pbuh) teachings from the Gospels:

My food is <u>to do the will of Him</u> who sent me and to complete His work. (John 4:34)
And this is eternal life, that they may know you, <u>the Only true God</u>, and Jesus Christ whom you hast sent. (John 17:3)
I can do nothing on my own. As I hear I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek to do <u>not my own will, but the will of Him</u> who sent me. (John 5:30)
... There is only One who is good. If you wish to enter into life, <u>keep the</u>

commandments. (Matthew 19:17)
For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother. (Matthew 12:50)
Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. (Matthew 5: 17,18)

2- Jesus never claimed that he founded "Christianity", or any religion for that matter. In fact, the word "Christian" was used for the first time by Pagans and Jews derogatorily, after Jesus (pbuh) had left this world. The Bible states:

... And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch. (Acts 11:26).

As for the word "Christ", it is an English derivative from the Greek word "Kristos", meaning "anointed" (messiah in Hebrew). Jesus spoke neither English nor Greek; his language was Aramaic, a sister language of Arabic and classical Hebrew.

3- Also, we find Jesus (pbuh) with Islamic observances, like: praying, fasting, greeting others, etc. Examples:

a- He prostrated in prayer, like Muslims.
And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, ... (Matthew 26:39)

b- He fasted for forty days. (See Matthew 4:2)

c- He greeted people saying: "peace be unto you", which means *Assalam Alaikum* in Arabic, as do Muslims.
... came Jesus and stood in the midst, and said unto them, Peace be unto you. (John 20:19)

19. **What do Muslims believe regarding Jesus Christ?**

A. Muslims believe in Jesus Christ (pbuh) as a mighty Messenger of God. No Muslim is a Muslim if he does not believe in him. Muslims respect him and revere him as much as they do Abraham, Moses and Mohammed (pbut). They also believe that his mother, Mary (pbuh), was chosen by God above the women of all nations, that he was conceived without father through the same power which brought Adam (pbuh) into being, and that he performed miracles, like giving life to the dead and healing the blind and the lepers, by God's power. Muslims also believe in his second coming before the end of time.

Jews and Christians have gone to extremes regarding the personality of Jesus (pbuh), while Muslims maintain the correct position. Jews reject him as a Prophet of God and call him an impostor. Christians consider him to be Son of God, or God incarnate, and raise him to a position of worship. Muslims believe him to be neither impostor nor God, but one of the foremost resolute Messengers of God.

The Muslim standpoint on the personality of Jesus agrees with the Bible. (See the following verses: Isaiah 43:10-11, 44:6, John 5:30, 7:16, Luke 13:33, Mark 10:18, Matthew 10:40-41, 12:50, 21:11, Acts 2:22)

20. **What about the Muslim position regarding Hindu Lords Rama and Krishna, and also Buddha?**

A. These persons could also be Prophets of God who were raised up in that part of the world (India), since according to the Qur'an, God has sent Prophets and Messengers to every nation throughout history. According to a saying of Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) the number of Prophets raised in the world was 124,000; only 25 have been mentioned by name in the Qur'an. If indeed Rama, Krishna and Buddha were Prophets, their teachings have certainly been corrupted. This is understandable when we consider that in those very olden times writing materials were not developed or readily available, communication was primitive and preservation of the original material for a long time was very difficult. When we can notice misconceptions about the personality of Jesus (pbuh), who lived only 2000 years ago, no wonder there has been much more severe distortion in the original teachings and actual personalities of the earlier Prophets, having less authentic historical records. Myths and stories about them, circulating among their followers now, bear no authenticity or authority from God.

Therefore, we can say that there is every possibility that Rama, Krishna, and Buddha also were equally the Prophets of God whose original teachings are not preserved intact.

21. **If Islam is the oldest religion and all the Prophets were Muslims, then why there are so many religions in the world?**

A. The Muslims believe in one God, one source of guidance and one basic message for all of mankind (that there is none worthy of worship except the One and Only God). Being the caring Creator and Sustainer of all mankind, God cannot be partial to choose one nation to the exclusion of all others for revealing His messages. He raised up Prophets in every nation to guide the people to the path of Truth and righteousness. The Qur'an states:

There is not a nation but a warner has passed among them. (35:24)
And for every nation was a messenger. (10:47)

With the passage of time the followers of earlier Prophets gradually started deviating from the original teachings. Ideologies and practices that were strange to the original teachings crept into the religion, unintentionally or deliberately, and the purity of belief in God was lost. However, God kept sending Prophets from time to time to remind them of the truth in order to bring them back to the right path, which they had lost. But none of these Prophets claimed that they were starting a new religion. Some people (the truth-seekers) listened to them, corrected themselves and became Muslim, while others remained arrogant in their false pride and stuck to the baseless practices and traditions.

22. **How do Muslims regard other religions?**

A. Muslims regard other religions as stages or links in the same faith. They do not regard them as religion**s** (plural), but the same original religion (Islam) which later lost its purity in various degrees at

various times and places, and because of the historical factors took different names. Therefore, Islam should not be seen as in competition with any of these so called religions, but rather is to be viewed the true and purified form of all these religions.

23. **If Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) was sent for all the people of the world, was his coming prophesied in earlier Scriptures?**

A. Yes. Though the earlier Scriptures are not preserved in their original form and have undergone changes with the passage of time, still we find clear glimpses of the prophecies. Examples:

1- In the Jewish & Christian Scriptures: There are many references both in the Old Testament and the New Testament, e.g., Deuteronomy 18:18, Genesis 21:13,18, Isaiah 42:1-13, John 16:7-14, John 14:16

2- In Hindu Scriptures: The Prophet is mentioned as "Mahamad" in Bhavishya Puran, Prati Sarg Parv III:3,3,5-8, and as "Narashansaha" in Atharva Veda, 20th chapter, Kuntap Sukt, which literally means 'the praised one' in English, equivalent to "Mohammed" in Arabic.

3- In Buddhist Scriptures: The Prophet is mentioned as "Maitreya" or "Mettaya" (*Miroku* in Japanese *Mei-ta-li-ye* in Chinese, *Mahitreja* in Tibetan) which means 'Mercy-unto-all', as the Qur'an calls the Prophet (pbuh).

4- In Zoroastrian (Parsi) Scriptures: He is mentioned as "Soeshyant" (the Mercy-unto-all) and "Astvat-ereta" in Zend Avesta and also in Dasatir, epistle of Sasan I, 55-61. (See 'Muhammad in Parsi, Hindoo and Buddhist Scriptures by A. H. Vidyarthi & U. Ali, published by Islamic Book Service, New Delhi, India.)

Prophecies about the advent of Mohammed (pbuh) in earlier Scriptures world-wide indicate that:

a- The source of all the revealed religions is the same, or in other words, the religion of all the earlier Prophets was the same (Islam).
b- The awaited Prophet, i.e. Prophet Mohammed (pbuh), is the universal Prophet. All people should now follow his teachings.

24. **Was the type of "Islam" of the earlier Prophets the same as that of the present day?**

A. Basically and essentially, Islam has been the same throughout the history of mankind. The fundamental teachings, i.e., belief in one God, adherence to a life of piety, goodness and peace, belief in life after death and ultimate reward or punishment, were the same. However, since all the Prophets earlier than Mohammed (pbuh) were sent locally for their own people and not for the whole world, the legal codes varied according to the needs and the stage of development of the society and civilization. These differences,

however, were minor and superficial, while the fundamentals were the same all through. Islam as preached by Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) is in its final, complete, perfect and comprehensive form; it is for all the people of the world and for all times to come. For this reason, its basic source of teachings – the Qur'an - is preserved intact in its exact original form and in its original language, which is not the case with any other Scripture.

MUSLIMS AND ISLAM TODAY

25. **Is it not correct that Islam is an Arab religion and all Arabs are Muslims?**

A. No. Islam is neither an Arab religion, nor are all Arabs Muslims. There are Arabs who are Christians and are Jews. Arabs constitute about 15% of the total Muslim population in the world.

26. **If Islam is a universal religion, then do we find Muslims all over the world?**

A. Yes. There are some 1100 million Muslims in the world living in over 120 countries, more than 50 of which have a majority Muslim population.

27. **Which country has the largest Muslim population?**

A. Indonesia, with 160 million Muslims.

28. **Are there Muslims in the former USSR and Communist China?**

A. Yes. The Muslim population in the Commonwealth of Independent States (the former Soviet Union) is 20%. Six states of the CIS have Muslim majority. In China, the Muslim population is 11%.

29. **Is there any European country with a majority Muslims population?**

A. Yes. Turkey (98%) and Albania (70%).

30. **What about the U.S.A.?**

A. Muslims in the USA are less than 5% but it is the fastest growing religion there.

31. **If it is claimed that Islam is a true religion, then how is it that we find such bad examples among the Muslims?**

A. This is unfortunate. But this is the case in all societies in the world where we find some bad examples. It has something to do with the nature of the people itself rather than the religion. Muslims are also

human beings, not supernatural, and are prone to commit mistakes and go the wrong way. Satan, the enemy of man, and always active in trying to keep man away from the right path, succeeds at times.

The bad behavior found among Muslims is mainly due to lack of proper Islamic knowledge, influence of the materialistic society, and weak faith in their hearts. Therefore, it is not correct to judge Islam by Muslims, but it is Muslims who should be judged by Islam.

THE MISTAKEN NOTIONS

35. Why is Islam so little known and so grossly misunderstood in the world, especially in the West?

There are many reasons for this. The main reasons are:

1- Many people assume the innate superiority and rightness of their own way of life that they do not consider it necessary or important to be accurately informed about others' view points and way of life. They simply keep following what their parents and society have taught them.

2- Many people judge any religious system in terms of their own ethno-centric concepts and values, or in terms of the concepts of Western civilization, which often do not fit with, or apply to, Islam.

3- Historically, Muslims and Christians confronted each other during the Crusades and afterwards. The propaganda against Islam, its beliefs and way of life, which was common during times of conflict, continued after many Muslim countries were colonized by the Western super-powers. This biased attitude has persisted in the Western world.

4- The behavior of the people, who call themselves Muslims but do not practise the faith, is largely responsible for a confused and distorted picture of Islam. Some Muslims profess this faith but do not live by it, doing everything which it does not permit and doing nothing which it requires.

36. Then how can Islam be properly understood in the non-Muslim world?

a- On the part of non-Muslims:

1- They should be open-minded, fair and objective in approaching Islam. They should clear their minds of any preconceptions they may have had about Islam.

2- They should look into the direct, authentic and basic sources of knowledge about Islam (the sources are: The Qur'an and the Traditions of the Prophet, *hadith*).

3- They should not rely on the indirect and unauthentic sources of information, particularly the news & views media, howsoever neutral and unbiased these may present themselves.

4- They should not base their judgment on the behavior of a section of Muslims but try to understand that Muslims are also human beings and are liable to commit mistakes.

b- On the part of Muslims:

It is necessary for them to abide by the teachings of Islam and present themselves as an example of good practising Muslims. Nothing can be more effective than setting an example.

37. It is generally believed in the West that Islam spread by the sword. How far is it correct?

This is a gross misinterpretation of historical conditions and events. Faith cannot be forced at the point of sword. If faith does not emerge from deep conviction, from within, it is not acceptable to God, nor does it help the person who accepts this faith.

If it were true that Islam spread at the point of sword, then :

1- How is that the Far East countries, like Indonesia and Malaysia, have embraced Islam *en masse*?
2- Why were there no mass desertions from Islam after the removal of force, if force was the reason for the spread of Islam?
3- How is it that Islam is still growing all over the world, and is the fastest growing religion in the U.S.A.? Where is the sword?
4- How is it that there are a good number of non-Muslims still enjoying their religious freedom even after centuries of Muslim rule?
5- How is it that the non-Muslim barbaric Mongols embraced Islam after conquering the Muslim lands? (This is a unique and strange event in world history that the conquerors have adopted the faith of the conquered ones.)

In fact, Islam is the only religion which guarantees peaceful freedom of faith and forbids compulsion in religion, since the truth has its own inherent strength. To quote the Holy Qur'an:

> *There is no compulsion in religion; Truth stands out clear from error; whoever rejects evil and believes in God has grasped the most trustworthy handhold, that never breaks; And God hears and knows all things.* (2:256)

Not only does Islam forbid to employ force in the propagation of Islam, but it also commands the use of the most peaceful methods. The Holy Qur'an states:

> *Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious; For your Lord knows best who have strayed from His path and who receive guidance.* (16: 125)

38. How about the matter of four wives – the question that is commonly associated with Islam?

A. To have more than one wife was not invented or introduced by Islam. It has been, and still is, a universal practice among mankind. Even in countries which are proponents of a "one-wife" theory, the practice of a man having relations with more than one woman does exist unofficially, even if it is not called polygamy.

The misunderstanding on this issue develops if the marriage to more than one wife is somehow considered as a religious requirement or as a licentious and irresponsible behavior towards a woman. The fact is that Islam has permitted polygamy as an optimal solution to certain social problems, allowing certain latitude to human nature but only within a strictly defined framework of the law.

We find in the Bible that a number of Prophets are known to have had more than one wife, and that no Prophet has prohibited this practice. We do not find that Jesus (pbuh) himself ever uttered a single word against polygamy.

The Islamic viewpoint, in brief, is as follows:

1- In Islam, marriage is not a business deal negotiated by two parties. It is something solemn and sacred. It is a contract to which God Himself is the first witness or the first party, and it is concluded in His name, in obedience to Him and in accordance with His commands. Its major elements are chastity, social integrity, human stability, spiritual elevation, love, peace and mercy. The Qur'an states:

... He created for you mates from among yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between you (or your hearts); verily in that are signs for those who reflect. (30:21)

2- For a man to marry four women is not an injunction or a requirement; it is a "permission" or a "concession" which is given with certain 'conditions' to be fulfilled by a man who wants to marry more than one woman, such as dealing justly with all of them in providing food, housing, clothing, kind treatment, etc.

... Marry women of your choice, two or three or four, but if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly [with them] then only one, ... (4:3)

3- This permission is given for a man to "marry", and not to 'buy' or 'seduce', nor is license given for lewdness and lust.

... provided you seek [them in marriage] with gifts from your property – desiring chastity, not lust ... (4:24)

Willingness on the part of the woman is an essential requirement for the marriage to be lawful. No one can force a woman to marry a married man, or any other man, for that matter. It is not an open-ended permission; it puts restrictions on the number of women to be taken in marriage -- up to four, as well as on the overall

situation. In fact, Islam is the only religion that has put such restrictions on plurality in marriage.

4- Islam is the religion for all people and for all times. So, it has to be flexible enough to suit all situations in human life, in all places; it has to offer solutions to all human problems. Thus, when women outnumber men in a society (e.g., after wars or natural disasters), or when a wife is not capable of bearing children, or when a widowed or divorced woman needs protection for herself and for her young children, etc., a man's taking her as an additional wife would be a humanitarian gesture and a good solution for all concerned. Then she can enjoy full social status and respect rather than becoming a victim of unhealthy and immoral circumstances or of loneliness.

5- Islam is a practical and a balanced religion. It recognizes man's polygamous tendency, and instead of going against it, it rather moulds it in such a fashion that is not harmful to himself or to the society. On the one hand it allows him to have more than one wife, making him responsible for his conduct towards each one, and on the other hand it prescribes severe punishment for extra-marital relations.

39. What is the Islamic position concerning "fundamentalism" and terrorism?

A. The word 'fundamentalism' is generally used in a loose, ill-defined sense.

- When the term is used referring to fanaticism and terrorism, then it is totally opposed to Islamic principles teachings; terrorism and Islam are poles apart. Violent behavior such as hijacking planes, exploding bombs, harassing and killing innocent persons, has nothing to do with Islam. One may understand that such violence is, in fact, a reaction by a section of society, in response to their sufferings or to the denial of their demands. It needs to be viewed, therefore, in its economic, political or historic context; it is not fair to blame Islam for this.

Terrorism is found at various levels all the world over, but unfortunately, when Muslims are involved, the media is often quick in identifying it as Islamic fundamentalism, while they do not use the words 'Jewish fundamentalism' or 'Catholic fundamentalism' when Jews or Christians are involved in similar acts.

- If the word is used in the sense similar to that in Christianity, which implies the Bible to be entirely the word of God, and the maintenance of interpretation of the traditional beliefs of Christian religion as opposed to more modern teachings, then it can be said that every Muslim is a fundamentalist. This is because a Muslim believes, for valid logical and historical reasons, that the Qur'an in his hand is

the word of God in its entirety and completeness, it is the source of guidance in all aspects of his life, and it provides him with peace and fulfillment in this life, and with salvation in the Hereafter.

40. What about *"jihad"* or 'holy war'?

Jihad, again, is a misunderstood and misinterpreted term. Usually, it is interpreted as waging a 'holy war' against non-Muslims, or as religious intolerance. The word 'holy-war' (*harb-muqaddasa* in the Arabic language) does not occur either in the Qur'an or in the Prophet's traditions – the basic sources of Islamic teachings. As for religious intolerance, this is totally against the teachings of Islam. Islam upholds the sanctity of all human life and protects the freedom of beliefs and worship for the followers of other religions.

The meaning of the Arabic word *jihad* is 'to strive, to struggle, or to exert'. The prime *jihad*, as the Prophet (pbuh) explained it, is at the level of one's own 'self', which is the struggle against one's evil intentions and inclinations, or for self-purification. At another level, it is a struggle in the community or society to remove evil, indecency and oppression, but this is to be done by using wisdom and means that are just and fair. There is yet another level of struggle at a wider scale wherein force is allowed, but under certain conditions and restrictions. This is aimed at restoring peace and justice to society, and is not to be intended for material or political gains, nor is it properly motivated when carried out with ethnic or nationalistic prejudices. To defend oneself against an evil or against oppression is a basic human right; likewise every nation in the world has the right to safeguard itself against oppressive powers.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

41. Can you briefly mention some of the distinctive features of Islam?

Islam, the only true and natural religion for mankind, has many unique features; a few are as follows:

1- **The Name:** "Islam" is the original name, given by God and mentioned in the Holy Book. It is a meaningful name which describes its outlook on life. As the name is not linked with any person, tribe, geographic location, or time, it reflects the universal character of Islam.

2- **Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) – as Historic Figure:** The person who brought the final message of Islam - his life, his teachings and his achievements are all in the full light of history. There are no myths or mysteries about him. Concerning his life, such a detailed and complete account has been preserved, as has probably not been kept concerning any other individual in human history.

3- **The Holy Qur'an - a Unique Scripture:** The Qur'an is the only Scripture in the world which is existing today in its exact, original form and in the original language (which is still a living language), and preserved not only by writing but also by complete memorization. It is inimitable, complete and unique in its content and style. It is the literal "Word of God" and not the words of the Prophet or other humans.

4- **Purity and Clarity in Concepts:** Islam is the only religion which is not marred by myths, superstitions and irrational philosophical ideologies. The teachings are simple and straight forward, and the concepts are clear and pure. There are no confusions and no complications.

5- **Most Complete and Comprehensive:** Islam is a total way of life which excludes nothing – a complete system governing all aspects of man's existence, individual as well as social. There is no compartmentalization of life into secular and religious; every activity in life is intended to be meaningful, goal-oriented and sacred.

6- **Practical:** Islam is a practical religion, within the reach of every person. It has a great deal of flexibility and practicability to cope with any arising situation. It is for all times and for all people.

7- **A Well-balanced and Moderate Approach:** It has a balanced approach to life and avoids extremes - a balance between physical and spiritual aspects, a balance between individual and social aspects, a balance in all directions. It presents a happy blending of body and soul, law and love, mind and heart.

8- **Satisfies the Human Intellect:** It is a religion in which there is no conflict between faith and reason, between science and religion, between the 'work of God' and the 'Word of God'. It invites man to think and reflect, and strengthen faith.

9- **Universal Brotherhood:** Islam goes far beyond all barriers of race, color, status, wealth, sex, etc., and assures all human beings equality and brotherhood. The most honored person in the sight of God is one who is most God-conscious.

10- **Free from Erosion:** Among the world religions, Islam alone has remained well-entrenched, deep-rooted and unaffected in the place of its origin, with no replacement and no erosion throughout history.

11- **Ever-Growing:** Despite the fact that there is no organized Islamic missionary work among non-Muslims, Islam is making headway in all parts of the world. It is the fastest growing religion in the U.S.A. It has never witnessed any large scale desertions from its fold. On the contrary, it attracted the conquerors (the Mongols) to adopt the faith of the conquered ones (Muslims) - a unique example in history (13th century).

42. **What is your concluding remark about Islam?**

A. Islam could be characterized as a course in self-management and in interpersonal management, focusing all the while on responding to God's presence and submitting to His guidance, thereby attaining peace, and making clear the meaning to our existence in this world.

This way of life, which is prescribed by God, can be yours for the asking.
